TESTIMONY OF CHARLES WOOLEY, DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Charles Wooley, Deputy Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Midwest Region. I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide you an update on one of the Administration's environmental priorities, restoring and protecting the Great Lakes. With our partners, we have taken many promising actions since President Bush signed the Great Lakes Executive Order in May 2004. Specifically, I would like to discuss the Administration's ongoing commitment to restore and protect the Great Lakes, including progress regarding the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.

The Great Lakes are the largest single source of fresh surface water in the Western Hemisphere. The Great Lakes ecosystem drains 288,000 square miles with 9,000 miles of shoreline, 5,000 tributaries and 30,000 islands. The Service's survey data indicate that fishing, hunting and wildlife watching generate nearly $18 billion in annual revenue in the Great Lakes region. In collaboration with others, the Service addresses natural resource issues that affect the fish, wildlife and habitats of the Great Lakes basin, as well as the 35 million people who live there.

In May 2004, the President signed Executive Order 13340 affirming the federal government's commitment to address environmental and resource management issues in the Great Lakes basin.

The Service's mission to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and their habitats, uniquely positions us to provide leadership in the areas of habitat, fish and wildlife, invasive species, and other natural resource information and indicators in the Great Lakes Basin. The Service has staff in 58 field stations, two regional offices and the Washington Office that serve the Great Lakes basin, coordinating and facilitating projects, working with partners, and leveraging resources.

Habitat and Fish and Wildlife

Great Lakes habitat loss and degradation is a pressing concern. The Great Lakes region has lost more than half its original wetlands and 60 percent of its forest lands, and the region only has small remnants of other habitat types such as savannah and prairies. These impacts are of concern to human health and prosperity, as well as the sustainability and biodiversity of Great Lakes wildlife, fish, and their habitats. Natural habitats and native fish and wildlife communities play a critical role in maintaining ecosystem health and function and contribute to the social and economic vitality of both the region and the nation.

The Administration strongly supports wetlands restoration efforts. In 2004, the President announced a bold initiative to restore, enhance, and protect three million acres of wetlands nationwide over five years. Specific to the Great Lakes region, the federal government,

including the Service, will join the states and private partners in an equally shared effort to develop wetland restoration plans that will enhance and protect a total of 200,000 acres over the next several years.

The Service implements a range of programs that contribute directly to restoring fish and wildlife species and their habitats in the Great Lakes. For example, in 2005 alone, the Service awarded $2.1 million in North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants to restore, protect and enhance 3,671 acres in the Great Lakes basin. We have worked with stakeholders through our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Great Lakes Coastal Program to restore and enhance wetlands and stream miles in the Great Lakes. We are often called upon to support protection of ecologically important coastal areas and wetland restoration, and through the Fish Passage Program we work to eliminate or modify barriers to allow passage of fish in Great Lakes waterways.

Through settlements under our Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program, the Service restored and enhanced 955 acres of wetlands, and we awarded $3.8 million in National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants in FY 2005 for partners to acquire 1,859 acres of wetlands along lakes Michigan and Superior. National fish hatcheries have stocked more than 30 million yearling lake trout in the Great Lakes over the past 10 years, contributing to lake trout recovery in Lake Superior.

The Great Lakes region is the ancestral homeland of 33 federally recognized Indian tribal nations whose reservations are located in the basin or who retain treaty-guaranteed rights to hunt, fish or gather in the basin. Tribal communities rely on Great Lakes natural resources to meet their subsistence, economic, cultural, medicinal, and spiritual needs. The Service recognizes its tribal trust responsibility and the important role of the tribal nations in protecting the Great Lakes. Some examples of our stewardship responsibilities and cooperative efforts with our tribal partners include fisheries assessment work with coaster brook trout, sturgeon, lake whitefish, sea lamprey and Eurasian ruffe; bird assessment work with sora, Virginia and yellow rails; and work under the 1836 and 1842 Treaties and the August, 2000 Consent Degree in *U.S. v. Michigan*.

Invasive Species

Introduction and establishment of invasive species in the Great Lakes is occurring at an alarming rate. More than 160 non-native aquatic species are established in the Great Lakes, and during the last several decades, populations of non-native species have been discovered at an average rate of one every eight months. Invasive species can inflict ecological damage – 42 percent of the threatened and endangered species in the United States are affected by invasive species.

Prevention of invasive species introductions and control of established populations of invasive species are critical actions to sustain and enhance ecosystem integrity and the social, economic and cultural uses the Great Lakes ecosystem supports.

As co-chair of the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force, along with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Service provides technical and financial assistance to the ANS Great Lakes Regional Panel to help develop State ANS management plans and to support

prevention, control and outreach activities in the region. Currently, as co-chair of the ANS Task Force, the Service is leading the development of a National Management and Control Plan for the Asian Carp.

In addition to the Asian carp, the Service works to combat the spread of other invasive species in the Great Lakes, including the round goby and zebra mussels. Working with our partners through outreach programs such as the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! Campaign and the 100th Meridian Initiative, the Service supports efforts to educate the public on ways to prevent the spread of these harmful organisms.

The binational Sea Lamprey Control Program, which is administered by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, is one example of a successful collaborative effort to control aquatic invasive species. The program's efforts have resulted in a 90 percent decline in sea lamprey abundance in the Great Lakes. Acting as agents of the of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and many other partners implement this program which is a model for integrated pest management programs to control other aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes.

The Service is also working with the Midwest Natural Resources Group, a partnership of 13 federal agencies, to develop an action plan to coordinate and develop inventories, mapping and treatment for terrestrial invasive species in the basin.

Information and Indicators

A successful restoration strategy for the Great Lakes must also include an informed decision making process based on consistent methods to measure and monitor key indicators of the ecosystem's function. Such measurements need to occur before and after the initiation of restoration efforts on local and basin-wide scales. Once collected, information must be compiled and communicated consistently to inform the restoration process, decision makers and the public. These activities will provide resource managers, elected officials and other stakeholders with the timely, accurate and cost-effective information necessary for making decisions about the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem to sustain healthy societies, economic activities and natural systems.

The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act (Act), enacted by Congress in 1990, has enabled the Service to facilitate partnerships with a wide range of federal, tribal, state, and local governments and private entities, as well as with Canada, to create a basin wide program to assess the ecological status of the Great Lakes. Projects under the Act that provide important environmental indicators include the design of geographic information systems describing the state of fish and wildlife habitats in the Great Lakes and studies of issues such as the occurrence of Botulism type E in Lake Erie. The Service appreciates Congress' interest to reauthorize this important Act and looks forward to working with Congress in support of reauthorization.

In addition, the Service will continue to update the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), which provides valuable information to help guide restoration efforts. The NWI is also important in

tracking the progress in achieving the President's goal of attaining an overall increase in the amount and quality of our Nation's wetlands.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the Service, through its programs and partnerships with others, supports continued efforts to restore and protect the Great Lakes and surrounding waters. We are committed to working with our many partners to ensure healthy fish and wildlife resources in the Great Lakes and to enhance and restore the health of this ecosystem. I congratulate our many partners on the progress made in the collaboration, and I especially appreciate the Environmental Protection Agency's role in helping achieve our goals.

The Great Lakes ecosystem faces many threats – from invasive species to contaminants to loss of coastal habitats. The Service stands ready to continue our role in fish and wildlife restoration and to expand our work with partners to make the world's largest freshwater ecosystem a balanced and healthy environment.

This concludes my testimony. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.